INTRODUCTION

Quilpie is a shire in South West Queensland. It consists of the town of Quilpie (the main business centre) and the smaller towns of Eromanga, Adavale and Cheepie. The shire spans approximately 67,547 square kilometres.

The current population of Quilpie shire is approximately 1022, with 654 residing in the town itself. Quilpie is reknown as being the home of the Boulder Opal. Cattle, sheep (both meat and wool) and tourism are the main industries, with transport services emerging as a vital element, along with oil and gas exploration. Surprisingly, we were told that mining accounts for 90% of the shire’s GDP, with cattle only 8% however cattle stocks are still recovering from the drought and it is expected that its GDP will increase.

Many of the five-member shire council were newly elected (or re-elected after a term’s absence) at the April 2012 Local Government elections and are bringing a fresh perspective to the area, including the Mayor, Stuart Mackenzie who is a grazier from Eromanga.

Quilpie prides itself on being a safe, clean town providing good amenity for its residents and visitors.

Quilpie is part of a local government alliance called the South West Regional Development Association and participates in the Outback Queensland Tourism Association.

The development of the RRATP for Quilpie was as a result of promotion by the LGAQ. The shire saw it as an opportunity to assist with the development of their first Economic Development Plan.

THE QUILPIE REGIONAL AND REMOTE AREA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAM (RRATP)

The Quilpie RRATP workshop was conducted on 13 and 14 December 2012 and hosted by the Quilpie Shire Council. Two Brisbane-based members of Economic Development Australia (EDA) – Margaret Blade and Tracy Scott-Rimington – facilitated the workshop over four sessions (the full program is at Attachment 1 and profiles of the EDA facilitators at Attachment 2).

The Quilpie RRATP was delivered through a round-table informal, interactive approach. Margaret and Tracy express their thanks to the Quilpie Shire Council: Monica James for making the arrangements and acting as host in showing them around the town and its attractions, and the Mayor, Councillors, CEO and
staff for their hospitality. The Mayor and CEO attended and presided over the entire program, along with the Deputy Mayor and 2 other Councillors and key Council staff, who are obviously passionate about their community and have a strong commitment to the economic development of Quilpie along with the broader South West region. Surrounding shires were also invited by Quilpie Shire Council to attend, and the Tourism Coordinator from Cunamulla attended on both days.

The list of attendees is as follows:

 Mayor Stuart Mackenzie  
 Deputy Mayor Jenny Hewson  
 Cr Stewart Sargent  
 Cr Tony Lilburne  
 Dave Burges (CEO)  
 Monica James (Community Services Manager)  
 Lisa Hamlyn  
 Janelle Cassol  
 Carmel Meurant (Cunnamulla Shire Council)  
 Janet Foley (day 1)  
 Duncan Watts (day 1, session 3)  
 Amanda Watts (day 1, session 3)

THE WORKSHOP

The Quilpie RRATP workshop was delivered in four sessions over two half-days.

Session 1- Margaret provided an introduction to EDA and the benefits of being a member. She advised that EDA is a network of economic development practitioners across Australia comprising representatives from local government (both elected and officers), RDAs, regional and tourism development bodies, consultants and private companies. Margaret and Tracy provided information on their backgrounds and how they got into economic development. Collectively, Margaret and Tracy have close to 55 years’ experience of working in regional economic development.

They delivered individual case study PowerPoint presentations which they had previously discussed with the Community Services Manager, on the following topics:

- Tracy - The Savannah Way;
- Margaret - Harnessing the opportunities of the Digital Economy.

These presentations generated much interest and discussion from which possible new resources for referral to the region were identified, and the presenters received more information from the participants about the Quilpie region and what drives the economy. Electronic copies of the PowerPoint presentations were provided.

Session 2 – In this session the Economic Development Toolbox was presented, again in an interactive manner. By way of introduction, participants were drawn out as to what ‘economic development’ meant to them, followed by a discussion of the various definitions in the Toolbox.

The five elements of the economic development process were explored in some detail:
An electronic copy of the presentation was provided.

**Session 3** – Two members of the business community joined in this round-table session which was facilitated by Tracy with the objective of exploring with the participants the following questions:

- What does Quilpie stand for?
- What is Quilpie’s vision for the next 20 years?
- What is existing and what are new and emerging ideas to drive the region’s economy? *(strengths and opportunities)*
- What are the issues/barriers to achieving outcomes? *(weaknesses/threats)*

**Session 4** – provided a recap and built upon Session 3, and the way forward.

**WORKSHOP NOTES**

**DAY 1**

**Session 3**

1. **What does Quilpie stand for?**
   - What makes this shire “unique”:
     - Rural, grazing – turning to tourism and oil & gas
2. **What is Quilpie’s vision for the next 20 years?**

Tourism – what is needed are: more options in tourism; more operators; investment; 2 big developments: self contained trade – is driven by baby boomers, not spending on accommodation but in other activities. Will stay longer if the amenity/attractions are available. Confident that tourism will continue to grow
- An issue is that Asian visitors want 5 star accommodation.

Mining will increase dramatically – oil and gas, and potential for coal
- Engineering services – 90% of the shire’s GRP is mining however it is not a Royalties for the Regions Shire (this will however be reviewed).
- Tourism is positive for the community while mining is perceived as creating damage down the track, eg Mt Isa.

Growth in population, perhaps to 1000 people in the town.

The Sheep industry has suffered because of a dog issue but is being addressed by Council and is very much still part of the region’s future - 70% income would come back to the community, eg 8 shearing teams in town created 30% additional revenue for businesses – also because of wool prices. Properties don’t have sheep anymore – they have cattle (easier to look after). Sheep are more labour intensive.

**Beef Cattle (including organic beef which is gaining momentum)**
- Quilpie is still a major distribution point (trucking)
- Australia supplies 23% of the world with beef with 3% of the beef population – 150-180,000 come from this region (30%)
- Beef cattle contributes only 8% of GRP but there is potential for increase as the industry recovers from drought
- Idea is for Council to have a weighbridge which would be advantageous to property owners buying and selling stock
- Carcass kill - possibility for an abattoir – can add to business case for rail. Would need to consider multicultural settlement/social issues Perhaps more feasible for Roma and Charleville because of the scale of needing to draw cattle from the east
  - there is an abattoir at Charleville – visas for overseas workers; further opportunities with a move away from live exports; more international investment likely, including skilled workers; major service centre.
- RSPCA is against saleyard selling (more and more cattle going straight to meatworks than saleyards), which lends impetus to getting a weighbridge.

Wild game (pigs and roos) – feasibility study done for a camel abattoir but not feasible – wild pigs hunting.

Trucking industry – cattle and other freight – the region could do more to foster this industry; there has been expansion in last 18-24 months which is seeing Quilpie being known as a trucking town and there is the opportunity for a major truck service centre in Quilpie - spinoffs for servicing the industry (much of the servicing is done in Brisbane); can also service tourists’ 4WD vehicles. [Could be formed through a cluster – bringing competitors together to solve an issue and form an alliance].

Rail – getting it going again. Coal gets priority so no room for cattle. The Government is paying QR National to provide services in the South West – contract signed to 2015 and will be renegotiated. QR is a private company utilising services that are more profitable.


*Observation: there is a great sense of the past in the town but no visual of the future (eg cattle sculptures in the main street); need to project where the region is heading as well as acknowledge its roots.*

3. What is existing and what are new and emerging ideas to drive the region’s economy? *(strengths and opportunities)*

Arts community; silversmithing; quilting exhibition (many people quilt while they travel), Music in the Mulga Festival (Cunnamulla) – links well with tourism.

Flora/fauna (including bird watching)/national parks (Hell Hole Gorge) natural sciences/opal fossicking – ties closely with tourism.

- Natural Sciences Loop (open 24/7) is the first iteration – it will be expanded upon as a dedicated website is developed and updated.

- Opals (interfaces with Tourism and Arts) – buoyant when the economy is good
  - Barriers: permits, fuel, native title
  - State Government legislation imposing taxes on hobby opal fossickers/dealers at the same rate as commercial miners is impacting on the local industry – information subsequently obtained from a local opal miner
  - Opal miners have been talking about setting up an Opal Centre
Looking to council to assist with infrastructure, staffing
- Only Quilpie and Winton have Boulder Opal – there may be opportunities for a closer look at what else can be done to capitalise on this (Japanese are keen and process/set the opal in silver)
- The local caravan park provides fossicking opportunities 60-70km away.

There is an emerging niche market in organic cattle – spinoffs: transport hub operations (see above).

Mining companies are making contributions to the community.

The following additional Opportunities were identified in the Day 2 workshop:

Clay (art)

Casino in the mulga – need to identify people to pick up the idea to take forward

Aviation – FIFO – if the town is going to expand, the airport has to be part of it – should be included in an ED plan

Tourism accommodation – 72 beds in Quilpie; there is a move away from homestays as now people want their own space.

- International tourists - there needs to be more accommodation to take a coach (44 people, needing ensuite rooms, about 10 singles)
- Undara example [http://undara.com.au/] – needs a champion to invest in this type of venture

Dinosaurs/mega fauna – tourism as well as educational

Promote and grow the Music in the Mulga festival

Big strengths of this community – safety, history, cleanliness, friendliness, river systems (Bulloo River is a closed system, no carp), amenity (eg free public pool), ADSL2 (Telstra – in the town only). There could be the opportunity to provide free wifi internet in the town – for residents as well as tourists

“Come to Quilpie for Quilting” – a slogan to attract niche market outback travellers perhaps? [subsequently added by Tracy]

4. What are the issues/barriers to achieving outcomes? (weaknesses/threats)

Low population – can’t get workers

- Mechanics are needed if the town is to establish a truck service centre
- How much is the problem getting them to move here? It’s because of the availability of housing and also the quality of housing.

The need to build more housing; expense plus difficult getting finance (need 50-60% deposit); investment in renovating; low rents (low ROI); high rents are only affordable by higher wage
earners/corporations eg Ergon. As more houses are built though there will be more confidence by the banks to provide finance and therefore increase confidence of investors: growth is on the horizon with market confidence and Council encouragement by building homes itself in order to encourage investment

- This is considered as a key area to concentrate on solving in order to progress other areas.

Distance (travel-through is not a problem) – Quilpie as a destination.

Mobile phone and internet coverage (some towns have fibre optic which enables mobile coverage – better than satellite; may be feasible to lay in the smaller towns in the shire). Digital opportunities are not available to all: eg visitors; Eromanga school file downloads; Telstra is the only carrier with coverage.

Rail – dominated by coal – discussions underway to plan for change; unlikely to see general freight by rail again; not economic to have a railway anymore (a deal that QR and the Queensland Govt did with privatisation makes it uneconomical); looking to put a business case to Government to change (to be done by a business consultant).

Freight costs (due to distance)

Government investment is difficult to obtain – eg the region auspiced a top prioritised RDAF round 2 project for the Darling Downs South-West RDA region for the establishment of a Dinosaur Museum at Eromanga, but the Federal Government approved the third prioritised project (in Toowoomba); have submitted again for round 4.

There is some resistance from local residents, who aren’t in favour of growth and don’t support tourism expansion:

- Impact on community identity
- Perception that this will create social problems; don’t have support services for this, eg people seeking social housing
- Need to take residents forward.

There is a level of volunteer ‘burnout’ but people will accede if approached individually – people are time poor but there is also reticence about legalities of taking on positions; spouse away and remaining spouse has to pay for childcare to participate; incentives for participation – something to look at.

Some networks need revving up, eg tourism group, SWREDS – contributes to strategic thinking.

Limited tourism season (weather fluctuations).

The workshop participants went through the Economic Development Action Plan (as prepared by the Council) and checked off its prioritisation.
DAY 2

Session 4

Tracy led a further workshop which:

- Provided an overview of Day 1 workshops
- Revisited and drilled down further into the SWOT analysis from Session 3 which identified further elements (notes from this session have been added into the above notes under the relevant headings)
- Reviewed and checked-off the Local Economic Development Model
- Wrapped up the workshop.

1. Overview of Day 1

Why does Quilpie need an Economic Development Plan?

- Consensus is that it’s needed but needs to be more specific
- Set targets
- Plan and manage activity
- Needs to be operational as well as strategic, and tied to budget.

Using the ‘so what?’ principle, what would happen if there wasn’t an ED plan?

- Activities would be more reactive than proactive

2. Revisited SWOT analysis (Session 3)

Notes from this session were added to the Session 3 workshop notes under the relevant headings (above).

3. Local Economic Development Model – review and check-off:

(1) Research
- Certain parts, eg projects, need more research.

(2) Consultation
- Ongoing/constant according to issues – opportunity to identify champions outside of council to drive; if people don’t participate, do consultations individually by Councillors or staff
- Eg truck service centre, developments – important to get feedback from businesses but a more structured arrangement would be better, to get an idea of supply/demand
- Work with the willing
- Need to develop a brief strategy for consulting/engaging re each project or setting up sector steering committees, eg a small group of willing people – an ED Officer can take this forward.
(3) Policies/Strategies
- Reasonably advanced in this area – have done an Action Plan and looking at budgets/long range financial plans
- Can set a strategy for each sector to take forward
  - Eg with the expansion of mining – needs to be anticipated and addressed at an early stage (eg benefits of FIFO).

(4) Projects
- Have identified a number of projects in the Action Plan, and more to go

(5) Engagement
- Getting the community on board for implementation.

4. Wrap-Up

- **Need for the development of a Vision from an ED viewpoint:**
  - What’s the “sizzle”/point of difference? (slogan/tagline: “Simply Unique”)
    - A growing community
    - Natural sciences, natural resources and eco systems – beef, sheep, oil, gas, dinosaurs, opals
  - Key words: Resilient, Sustainable, Diverse, Eco systems, West, 3 river system - use these words to work on alternative catch-phrases for a Vision

- **Where to from Here?**
  The Council is well positioned to move ahead, and has already done a lot of the groundwork
  - Feed the Action Plan into the bigger Vision for the region
  - Prioritise effort and finances
  - Writing up the plan – CEO?
  - Sector consultation
  - Community consultation – feedback to assist with prioritisation and validate what’s been done
  - Research (ahead of consultation) - much of this is already done; flag research yet to be done
  - Start implementing
  - Consider reclassifying new Tourism Officer position to Economic Development Officer
  - Get in and work the networks:
    - [http://www.gmusg.com/WSCMConfig/Presentations/Desert%20Knowledge%20Australia%20Mining%20Services%20Network%202010.pdf](http://www.gmusg.com/WSCMConfig/Presentations/Desert%20Knowledge%20Australia%20Mining%20Services%20Network%202010.pdf) – these have the latest information about grants, etc
    - Exchange information and collaborate with RAPAD (Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board) where appropriate [www.rapad.com.au](http://www.rapad.com.au)
ACTION ITEMS - FACILITATORS

Provide the workshop report early in the New Year

Provide a model for RAPAD that Quilpie representatives can present to a SWRED meeting (Attachment 3)

Information on Tourism grants:


Provide linkages:

- Senator Jan McLucas, Regional Development Parliamentary Secretary for Queensland
- South East Queensland region (eg cross-promotions)
- EDA – re membership benefits www.edaustralia.com.au
  - can list vacancies in the weekly EDA national e-newsletter

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